



Leading Quality Addiction Treatment in the Northern Rockies

EXHIBIT 12
DATE 2-3-2011
HB _____

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF RESTORING FUNDS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED DRUG COURTS

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Chief Executive Officer

I am here today to speak on behalf of the four criminal drug courts in Billings—and most importantly to speak on behalf of the many current and future drug court participants who are finding a new life as a direct result of the treatment and supervision they receive in these drug courts. Behind the numbers I am prepared to present, are lives once broken, being restored and each story is one of hope and promise and reality.

There is no question—I repeat, no question, that drug courts are the most cost-effective community-based diversion program we have today. The research and data are extensive. For every \$1.00 we spend on a drug court participant, \$7 to \$9.00 is saved in the criminal justice system and the healthcare delivery system. There is no more robust cost benefit analysis for any other program in our criminal justice system! Why, then, would you want to reduce the budget of these courts by 35%? And 35% is what is contained in this budget proposal. It is shameful and counter-productive. To take your most effective rehabilitative intervention and reduce it so drastically that you lose over half of the drug courts in our state, is just not comprehensible.

I want to be sure that you understand the impact of such a reduction—at current levels of funding, we are paying for bare bones drug courts. For example in the Billings Misdemeanor Drug Court, state funding pays for a coordinator and a counselor. Yet each week, seven professionals meet to review, staff, and plan services for drug court participants. Each agency that supplies a team member pays for the time they spend on a weekly basis working on behalf of the drug court. This amounts to well over half a day each week, year round. Treatment dollars have to be supplemented by the federal formula funds received by the chemical dependency bureau or drug courts could not function at all. There is, if you will, no fat in our current budget and a reduction of the magnitude proposed here, will cause the demise of many of these courts.

**Testimony in Favor of Restoring Funds for
Community-Based Drug Courts
February 1, 2011
Page 2**

I have brought one of our legislator alert mailings that gives more information on the return on your investment in drug courts and I want to leave one for each of you. Dr. Paul Polzin, of the Bureau of Economic Research at the University of Montana, recently gave us a formula that allows us to calculate what the impact of increasing rates of employment among our drug court participants is. On an annualized basis, increasing employment in this group results in no less than 1.5 million new dollars circulating in our economy—and that is from just one of our drug courts.

The savings in days of incarceration, in days of poor health, and money formerly spent on drugs all are on top of the new employment dollars. You can see why the cost benefit ratio is so high.

What you can't put a price to is the impact of returning healthy parents to his/her child and to the quality of family life that results from recovery from drug addiction. And we have no authoritative measure of the impact of reducing drunk drivers through drug court treatment and participation but each of these is happening every day, year round, by teams of dedicated community-based professionals who need your support, encouragement and frankly, your thanks. Please don't tie their hands or defeat their hard-won efforts.